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WILL THE POWERS INTERVENE IN THE WAR?

BY FRANCIS CHARMES, FOREIGN EDITOR OF THE "*REVUE DE DEUX MONDES*."

FROM one end of Continental Europe to the other public sentiment is, we will not say hostile, but certainly opposed to England in regard to the war which she has just inaugurated against the little South African Republic. We believe there is not a single exception to this general statement, or, at least, no national exception, for there are of course individual ones. The conviction is current everywhere that England has been the real aggressor, although the actual rupture of the peace was the act of the Transvaal. The real author of a war is considered to be that nation which by its deliberate procedure has rendered it inevitable. Now, even if the Transvaal has committed, in its policy, or, rather, in its domestic administration, blunders and faults which have served England as a pretext, nobody doubts that she has looked forward to the approach of war with apprehension and sadness and that she has done all that was in her power to avert the scourge. The idea that the Transvaal desired the conflict and coolly provoked it cannot enter the mind of any reasonable man. Not so with England. The superiority of her strength—great indeed, though she may have had an exaggerated estimate of its immediate efficiency in a war of this kind—was an encouragement and a temptation to her. Hence the universal opinion in Europe is that nothing would have been easier for her than to avoid war if she had the will or even the serious desire, and that the war broke out because she did not have the desire and the will to prevent it. The odium of being the aggressor, therefore, falls upon her, and this odium could be dissipated only by a clear and cogent demonstration that great wrongs were on the side of the Transvaal.

This does not mean that no wrong is apparent on the part of the latter, for there even was a time when public sentiment was greatly opposed to the Republic. Probably all that would have been required on the part of England was to foster that sentiment and use it as a lever; but she neglected it and preferred the use of force. From the time of the Jameson raid, the sympathies of all have been with the Transvaal. That act was so disloyal and so brutal that it could not and did not fail to arouse unqualified reprobation. However, it soon appeared clear that all was not right at Johannesburg and that the situation of the Uitlanders there was intolerable in certain respects. If they exploited the country, the Boers for their part exploited them, taxing them by all known means of oppression and refusing them rights which might serve them as means of defense and protection. The complaints of the Uitlanders then appeared legitimate, and if they found an echo all over Europe, that echo was perhaps more distinct in France than anywhere else, and for the simple reason that about fifteen hundred millions of francs of French money are employed in the gold and diamond mines of South Africa. A reform in the inner situation of the Transvaal was therefore necessary, and it began to be demanded more and more imperiously, when the English Government took the matter in hand. Its intervention was at first hailed with favor; the happiest results were expected. But it was soon found that England was placing other interests of a different character alongside and even above the economic interests of the Uitlanders; in a word, that under cover of defending a general cause, she had in view a merely personal one which was entirely political.

The diplomatic publications, which followed in large numbers, confirmed this feeling, and it became evident when the results of the interview at Bloemfontein were made known. It was a surprise to hear that Sir Alfred Milner demanded for foreigners rights which were almost exclusively political, or, rather, electoral. The extreme importance which was attached in these discussions to the question whether the plenary right to vote should be enjoyed by the Uitlanders after five years of residence, or after seven or still more, seemed out of all proportion to the practical interest involved. In fact, the Uitlanders would have been perfectly satisfied with the granting of certain

municipal rights in the Rand that were connected with the needs of their daily life, and they probably cared more for the unhindered continuation of their original nationality than for the acquisition of a new one which they would afterward have laid aside again as soon as possible. They protested, for example, against certain monopolies, which were positively oppressive, such as the dynamite monopoly. These, however, were hardly mentioned at Bloemfontein. Sir Alfred Milner, faithful to the instructions he had received from Mr. Chamberlain, laid down a political basis for the question; that is to say, a basis on which it was sure to clash with another—namely that of the internal sovereignty of the Transvaal, which the treaties had perhaps left in doubt, and which could not be touched, especially at such a moment, without extreme danger. From that day, people began to wonder whether England really meant to bring about a peaceful settlement, and they soon reached a negative conclusion. President Krüger clearly understood the case, and he would have done better if he had accepted the first propositions of the English. He would have placed them in a difficult situation by obliging them to declare themselves satisfied or to show their hands. These propositions were not such as could not be accepted, for he had to accept them later, unfortunately too late. The English had already formulated others. Mr. Chamberlain's adroitness consisted in continually shifting the ground, in constantly inventing new and more exorbitant demands until he tired out Mr. Krüger and induced him to say that he would grant everything provided the independence of the Transvaal were preserved. But Mr. Chamberlain immediately replied that the Transvaal was not an independent State, that it was a rebellious vassal, and that Great Britain could no longer tolerate its attitude of revolt. The words which the British Minister used were wilfully insulting and stinging. If the Transvaal had been able up to this time to entertain the slightest doubt as to her adversary's intentions, that doubt was now dissipated. War had become inevitable.

It was then that a revulsion of European opinion took place in favor of the Transvaal. In France especially—and America will not be surprised at that—there is a love of countries that struggle for their independence, that are ready to stake all in order to acquire or maintain it. And so the sympathies of the

people went out to the brave little Republic. At the same time they were curious to know for what reasons the English Government desired and brought about a rupture, and these reasons were not found to be very edifying. It is certain that money, the thirst for material wealth, has had much to do with the sad outcome. When blood is shed for gold, when cupidity is combined with cruelty, the conscience of mankind is revolted. It is thought in Europe that the affairs of the Chartered Company were dull and on the point of becoming poor; that a crash was already threatening; that Mr. Cecil Rhodes's bold speculations were about to end in a catastrophe in which a large part of the English aristocracy would have been involved. The Chartered Company had to be saved at any cost, and the only chance of saving it was by war. That was perhaps the principal motive that brought about this decision. But there was another. For various reasons there is great discontent in the English colonies of South Africa, which, without impairing their loyalty, showed itself in the last elections by a movement which put the Afrikanders in power. Now, the Afrikanders are the friends and relatives of the Boers in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The same blood flows in their veins and appeals to their imaginations. By reason of its independence, the Transvaal was, as it were, the pivot about which all sorts of discontent collected. So this independence had to be crushed, and England determined to crush it, being convinced that when that task was accomplished the impatience of the Afrikanders would be checked, submission would be general, and all the dangers of the future would be averted.

It will be understood that these considerations, some of which moreover do not appear on the surface, have had a different effect on public opinion in England and in the rest of Europe. We have stated what the latter was; but between it and the conclusion that it will lead to an intervention between England and the Transvaal there is a very long step, especially when we attempt to decide what Government will be driven to intervene; indeed, the step is so long that it will not be taken. When a conflagration breaks out nowadays, the first thought of everybody is to confine and localize it—that is to say, not to interfere; and the principle of non-intervention has never been so much in favor as at this conclusion of our century. It was believed

in America during the war with Spain that there existed in Europe, or at least on the part of some of the Powers, some desire to intervene diplomatically if not by force of arms. It was stated that England had objected, and so prevented any manifestation of ill-will. This idea, which was adroitly exploited by those who might profit by it, was absolutely erroneous. The tendency to-day is to form a ring around the combatants without meddling with their quarrel, until they have had enough and themselves solicit the good offices of one or more Powers. Even in the last war between Greece and Turkey, notwithstanding the general sympathy with Greece, Europe waited patiently until Greece was beaten, and did not intervene until requested to do so. Even then Europe interfered only because she knew that Turkey was quite willing, that after having gained some glory Turkey also desired the end of a war from which no other profit was to be derived. We do not say that that was very chivalrous, but so it was; such are the new ways of countries which have all become more or less democratic and subject to military service. To bring them out of their apathy it requires some important, evident, urgent self-interest, for the Old World is now governed by selfishness far more than by generous sentiment. Now, we do not see that there is any power which is sufficiently interested, near or far, in the Anglo-Transvaal war to impose or even spontaneously to propose intervention. If France, for example, had a mind to pick a quarrel with England, or even to accept quarrels which England seemed to seek, she would have had better opportunities. We need not speak of Austria—the smallest of the great Powers from a maritime point of view, and absolutely insignificant as regards colonies; no Power could be less interested in what is going on in a continent where she does not possess an inch of territory. As for Italy, she calls herself England's friend and perhaps believes it herself, notwithstanding the absolute sterility mingled with some mortification that this friendship has brought her. She can certainly not be suspected of preparing any move that might embarrass England, or that would be regarded by the latter as anything but an entirely friendly act. There remain Russia and Germany.

Evidently Russia cannot be regarded as indifferent like Austria, or as following in the wake of Great Britain like Italy. But what interest has she in Africa? We should be tempted to

say that she has not any if it were not inevitable for so great a Power to have some interests everywhere, either directly or indirectly. It is known, moreover, that certain common religious tendencies have awakened her traditional sympathies with Abyssinia; but they are quite platonic. In reality, Russia's entire efforts are concentrated in Asia, and it is quite true that she there encounters England at several points as an obstacle or a limit. England and Russia may, therefore, consider themselves as eventual enemies in an undetermined future which is, however, probably remote. Both have in these latter times made so many mutual concessions as to suggest that they entertain a sincere desire not to offend each other. If it were not so, we might say of Russia what we said of France, that more favorable opportunities than the present one have not been lacking; as she refrained then, she will certainly refrain now. The only secret desire she may be supposed to harbor is that England may remain occupied and in a certain measure absorbed as long as possible by the Transvaal war; but for that it is only necessary to let her alone. There is no need of any intervention. Indeed, if such intervention were successful, England would at once have her South African army disengaged for other purposes. Who can tell but she might then be tempted to use it elsewhere, either in consequence of her present warlike impulse, or because, when that impulse has been suddenly arrested at one point she might attempt to seek revenge or compensation at another. And it does not seem that Russia would be the gainer.

As for Germany, she is perhaps the country in which the unscrupulous policy of England has been condemned most vehemently. Her newspapers have distinguished themselves by the bitterness which they have mingled with their anger. But we are not now speaking of the opinions of the people—that is unanimous, as we have said—but of the attitude of the Governments. Governments can think and feel like peoples without speaking like them, and above all, without acting according to their feelings. In Germany, since the time of Kant, and even before, a great difference has always been made between pure reason and practical reason, and they are all the more apt to give themselves up to the speculations of the former the less they know how to avail themselves of the latter. For how many centuries did not Germany tend toward unity without making

the energetic effort that would bring it to a consummation. Her thinkers and her poets wrote about it long before her men of action seriously thought of pursuing it, as Bismarck said, with fire and sword; that is to say, by the only means suitable for its accomplishment. We must not then believe that Germany is ready to act when she speaks, and only because she speaks; but judging from her history, it is perfectly permissible to believe that she does not speak in vain, but bides her time. Her true feelings toward England are not feelings of sympathy; one is often tempted to believe that they are quite the contrary, but the time has not yet come to make them the rule of her policy. In this respect William II. is the true representative of his nation. He does not like England, and she can hardly be in doubt on this point; for, whether impelled by the ardor of his temperament or the exuberance of his speech, he has not hesitated on numerous occasions to speak his mind freely. In this matter, Germany and her Emperor obey an instinct which does not deceive them. It is almost inevitable, unless the two countries are always governed by very able and very pacific statesmen, that their conflicting interests will sooner or later provoke a quarrel. The Emperor is well aware of it, and it is on this account that he insists with passionate obstinacy on the development of his navy. It is his fixed idea which continually besets him; even when he himself imagines that it has given him a respite, it suddenly springs up again in his mind and lays hold of him like a nightmare. It is well known at what cost he succeeded last year in inducing the Reichstag to adopt his naval sexennate bill. It was then generally believed, and he no doubt believed it, too, that thereafter he would need to ask for nothing more for six years; but lo, on the 18th of October last, he uttered a new note of alarm and distress at Hamburg, and once more denounced the insufficiency of his navy for sustaining the policy which would enable Germany to work out her manifest destiny. The very next day the Government papers announced that further very important and very heavy appropriations would be asked of the Reichstag to carry out a scheme of naval construction laid out not for a space of only six, but for seventeen years. Will the Reichstag grant these appropriations and once for all shackle not only its own liberty, but that of three subsequent legislatures in order to conform to the imperial plan? We do not know;

at any rate, there will be great resistance, but the Government is not without the means of overcoming it. What are we to conclude from all this, but that a Hohenzollern once more seeks to give Germany, even in spite of herself, the means of realizing her violent but vague aspirations? He for his part shares these aspirations, but in his position, with the sense of the responsibility that he would incur by hasty and inadequate execution, he sees very clearly and feels very keenly that he still lacks the means of action. So he negotiates with England on the subject of the east coast of Africa; he seeks to obtain by diplomacy what he cannot take by force; he goes to London to see his old grandmother. In short, he restrains himself, and we are quite convinced that he will continue to restrain himself and that he will not intervene in the present war.

England will therefore be allowed to fight out her quarrel with the Transvaal to the end, and the disparity of strength of the two combatants is so great that the weaker must infallibly succumb. But whatever may happen hereafter, the Transvaal will not succumb without glory. The boldness with which she declared war because she was resigned to die rather than voluntarily surrender her independence, the coolness she has shown on the battlefield, and the first successes which have demonstrated her courage—all this will be recorded to her credit in history. But she will be conquered. To make this outcome doubtful, the Afrikanders would have to rise and make common cause with the Boers. Then the situation would assume some resemblance to that which arose in America at the close of last century; but even then, if England persisted in the struggle, she would undoubtedly win. Only the war, which even now threatens to be a long one, would then be greatly protracted; it would be marked by greater atrocities; in short, the situation would long remain in suspense and the problem of the difficulties and the remedies which England has encountered in Ireland—a problem referred to by the few orators of the Liberal opposition—might easily be again realized. In that case, which we deem improbable, we should have to affix a note of interrogation to all that we have said above, and England, whose prestige would not be increased by anything that could then happen, might find embarrassments in Africa or elsewhere, although it may be impossible now to foretell how they would arise.

Nothing tangible therefore is likely to happen at present in consequence of the Anglo-Transvaal conflict. Public opinion will condemn the war, but the Governments will not move. None of them, as we have said, has an interest sufficiently great or direct to intervene between London and Pretoria, and the interests which some of them have outside of Africa would not be well served by intervention. Moreover, before provoking the Transvaal, England was careful to take precautions in all directions. At the close of last year, she came to an understanding on all African questions with France, and the arrangement thus made assured to the latter the continuity of her territories and satisfied her for the present. England has also had an understanding with Russia concerning the extreme East, so there is no immediate clash to be feared in that quarter. The same is true respecting Germany. In treating with that Power, England seems to have had two points in view at once—the Samoan Islands and the east coast of Africa. They had a strong desire for the Samoan Islands in Berlin, the more so because the imperial diplomacy had suffered some mortifications, the sting of which was still felt. By consenting to submit the definite situation to be established in the islands to negotiations which promised to be protracted, and which moreover could be drawn out as long as the English Government desired, it felt sure of being able to occupy and restrain the German Government by holding out a hope to which the latter attached a very great value. This hope has now been realized, and Germany has obtained her desire. She could not therefore manifest any hostile sentiments so soon afterward. There is, however, reason to believe that she regards the cession of the principal islands in the Samoan group as a mere sop and that her pretensions do not stop there. She already has considerable possessions in the east and in the west of Africa—we shall speak at present only of the former—and she has been giving her attention to the extension which the English possessions cannot fail to take in the near future in consequence of the Transvaal war. They are, in fact, destined to grow prodigiously. But a few years ago Mr. Cecil Rhodes was credited with the scheme of establishing between Northern and Southern Africa, between Egypt and the Cape an uninterrupted continuity of territory over which England exercised either paramount influence or actual sovereignty.

That scheme seemed chimerical. It is no longer regarded as unattainable at the present day, and it was natural that Germany should take it into consideration. Would she be prevented from expanding further in any direction? Nobody can tell exactly what has been agreed upon between Berlin and London, but everybody knows that something has—doubtless to the detriment of the Portuguese colonies—and it is thought also that Germany too is satisfied for the present. There may be some difficulties on this head later on, between her and England. However that may be, it is known that the latter has taken the precaution and found the means of securing a certain respite for herself during which she need fear no trouble from any quarter. There is also reason to believe that this respite will be sufficiently long for her to complete her undertaking. If she rushed into the conflict headlong in a military sense, she acted more prudently in her diplomacy, which is an additional reason for believing that she will not be disturbed by anybody in the execution of what everybody regards as an atrocity. But the opinion will prevail that an atrocity has been committed against a weak nation whose chief fault was the possession of gold mines. It will be seen once more what England is capable of when her interests are involved in the slightest degree, and how lightly she then esteems the rights of others and humanity. She speaks continually of civilization; but outside of her own boundaries nobody admits that the cause of civilization is interested in the Transvaal war. The high-sounding words with which she disguises her conduct may deceive herself, but abroad they produce a very different effect. It would have been more sincere if she had invoked only her great material interests and the right of the stronger in this affair. After all, there are other European nations in whose history sins of the same kind are found, but then they committed them in a less pharisaical, and therefore less offensive, manner. All of which is a subject for serious reflection for all the nations of the old continent, at least for all those which have a navy and colonies. The fact is that the Transvaal affair is only an episode which has a root from which others may spring. At the present time there may be observed in England the fermentation of a peculiar virus which we call Chauvinism or jingoism with which the policy of that great country is, as it were, infected. This policy has become more

and more brutal in its methods than it used to be. The generation to which Mr. Gladstone belonged is gone, and we may say the same of that to which Lord Salisbury belongs, for Lord Salisbury is no longer the master of his own party. The Liberal party and the Conservative party both obey similar influences which are well represented by Lord Rosebery and Mr. Chamberlain. New men have come into political power who not only possess insatiable ambition, but a certain hard, cold, inexorable quality as regards the means by which they would realize their ambition—a personal arrogance and a disdain of others, a cruel absence of feelings that come from the heart such as used to give evidence of their existence, even when force was used, by a certain considerateness prompted by esteem and pity. Of these not a trace is now left, and of a truth Europe would not be sorry to have Prince Bismarck back, whose soul was not too tender, if she were to fall under the hegemony of statesmen such as shine to-day in the British firmament.

These are the impressions she has received from the events of these last months. The nations feel them keenly and the Governments are not insensible to them. Each makes its own reflections on them and there are lessons that will not be lost in what is now going on. However, a part of these impressions consists in the horror which war inspires more and more as our manners grow more gentle, and hence we must not conclude that they will necessarily lead to military conflicts. Everybody desires peace, but feels at the same time that this peace may be disturbed notwithstanding this general desire by some particular opposing desire. For this reason many differences between certain nations are beginning to be minimized and at the same time new interests involving new alliances are arising. It is still only a psychological condition, but in the inevitable evolution of things, that which enters deeply into men's minds and consciences will some day produce its influence on events.

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